

# Kids and the Holidays: Keeping the Season Bright When Money Is Tight

**If you're low on funds this holiday season, here's how to keep the holidays happy for your kids.**

Many families may be feeling the pinch this holiday season. It can be especially hard when you have kids. There are lots of ways other than presents and decorations to celebrate the season.

Many of the things children remember about the holidays are the experiences, and not the material items. So, don't stress — try some different ways to give your children a memorable holiday season.

## Setting the stage

- **Talk with your kids.** Children of a certain age understand that it takes money to buy things. Explain to them you don't have a lot this year, and that there will be fewer presents. It's important to give them realistic expectations. However, don't go into details about your finances as that can create anxiety, especially with young children.
- **Tell them what's important.** Remind children that the holidays are really not about material things. Get them excited about other things, like fun family traditions, visits with cousins or meals with special foods.
- **Talk to family, friends and co-workers.** Let them know that you're on a strict budget this year. Suggest eliminating the gift exchange, or putting a \$5 limit on it. (Others may be relieved!) Put the money you save toward your kids.
- **Ask your child if they remember any of the gifts they received last year.** The idea is not to make them feel guilty. But their answers may convince you that lasting joy comes from making their favorite cookies with you, or having a snowball fight or taking a ride to see holiday lights.
- **Volunteer with the entire family.** There are numerous opportunities for people of all ages and abilities to give back to the community you live in.
- **Leave the credit cards home.** Try taking out a certain amount of cash from the bank. Limit yourself to that amount. That way, you can't give in to the temptation to buy those things you just happen to see — and "must have" — when you're looking for something else.
- **Try to buy your child's top-choice gift.** Then add a number of very small gifts so that they still have the joy of opening several.
- **Shop at a dollar store.** You can buy many small items that children love, such as coloring books, toys and stickers. You can also find low-cost wrapping paper and ribbon.
- **Make it yourself.** Maybe your teen would like a knitted scarf in her favorite color. Your toddler would probably be thrilled with a simple doll. Look online or get a library book to find other ideas.
- **Create personalized "gift cards" for activities you can do together.** These could be anything your child enjoys — going sledding, having a barbecue on the beach, fishing or staying up late to watch a movie.
- **Work with your children on making their own personalized gift cards** so they can learn a special gift doesn't have to be associated with spending money.
- **Get a jump on next year.** Right after the holidays, retailers offer great discounts on merchandise. Holiday items are on clearance. Stock up for the coming year. Decide on a place you'll store the items.

## Gift-giving on a shoestring

Here are some ways to avoid breaking the bank this year:

- **Make a list before you shop.** Be specific, noting each person you want to buy for and what the gift will be.
- **Write down the amount you'll spend, and stick to it.** You may find yourself in a post-holiday funk if you overspend. And you risk feeling a heavy sense of regret when the bills come.

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If you can't afford gifts for your children, call the local Toys for Tots or get in touch with your house of worship.